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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: ABU HATEM URGES U.S. TALK WITH IRAN, SYRIA

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CLASSIFIED BY: Louis Bono, Director, Basrah Regional Embassy
Office, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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¶1. (C) Maysan's legendary resistance leader Abu Hatem (Abdul Kareem Mahod) met with the director of the Regional Embassy Office (REO) Basrah Louis Bono April 8 and urged the U.S. government to open talks with Iran and Syria. "There can be no stability in Iraq without dialogue with Iran and Syria," he said. Nicknamed the Prince of the Marshes for his leadership of the Marsh Arabs against Saddam Hussein, Abu Hatem admitted that he is in contact with Iran for "strategic reasons." He added that genuinely warm relations do not exist between the peoples of the two countries. He declined to name his Iranian contacts, but reported that Iran's intelligence agency backs the Ja'ish al-Mahdi (JAM) militia, ostensibly loyal to Moqtada al-Sadr, while the Iranian Revolutionary Guard supports the forces of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), led by Abdel Aziz al-Hakim. Iraq is the battleground for Iran's internal power struggle, he said. Abu Hatem added that a Washington-Teheran dialogue also would provide a framework for the United States to address Iran's uranium enrichment program and for Iran to air its security anxieties caused the U.S. military presence in its eastern and western neighbors.

¶2. (C) Abu Hatem said the Iraqi people are caught between the hammer of the United States and the anvil of Iran. In his view, the Iraqi leaders, who are largely returned exiles from Iran,

are out of touch with the suffering of the Iraqi people. He asserted that the United States and its British allies are responsible for the Iraq debacle, removing Saddam Hussein only to allow hundreds of small dictators to replace him. "The United States needs to change course, then good things can begin to happen," he said. He added that the United States has tried to build a new political order in Iraq without knowledge of local conditions. He laughed derisively at the Coalition plan to implement Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) in Maysan Province April 18. "PIC is a joke. The Governor is an OMS (JAM) member," he said. He added that militia warfare will break out in Maysan between JAM and SCIRI. He described the JAM gunmen as brainless rabble, intent only on wreaking violence, but said the SCIRI forces have a far-reaching political vision. Abu Hatem said that the Coalition squandered opportunities to stabilize Iraq by ignoring his counsel to initiate massive educational exchanges between American and Iraqi universities and to create jobs for unemployed youths who have since been recruited by the militias.

13. (C) The REO director agreed with Abu Hatem's assessment of the dire future prospects and the lack of effective political leadership. "Iraq is at a fork in the road. It can become like Dubai. Or it can become like Somalia," he said. The director said that the United States came to Iraq with the intent of bringing peace and democracy, but after four years, it is unclear how much longer the Coalition can stay in Iraq. What is clear, the director said, is that the Coalition can not do the job alone. "We need to mobilize Iraqi civic leaders, who are trusted by the people and who share our vision for a better Iraq," he said. As for Abu Hatem's suggestion to open talks with Iran, the director noted that Secretary Rice has stated that she will meet her Iranian counterpart anywhere to discuss any topic if Iran ceases its uranium enrichment and reprocessing program.

14. (C) Comment. Abu Hatem's recommendation for talks with Iran and his assessment of Coalition failures in Iraq carry a lot of weight because of his towering reputation as an Iraqi nationalist who stayed in Iraq and resisted Saddam then threw

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his support behind the Coalition after Saddam was toppled. End comment.
BONO